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ABSTRACT

This issue reviews five publications that provide a sampling of current perspectives on the preparation of school leaders. Joseph Murphy's "Preparation for the School Principalship: The United States' Story" traces the history of leadership preparation programs in the United States from the 19th century to the present. David L. Clark's "Searching for Authentic Leadership in University Graduate Programs and with Public School Colleagues" outlines the current shortcomings of preparation programs and sketches some recommendations for reform. Willis and Carol Furtwengler's "Performance Assessment in the Preparation of Education Administrators: A Journey" describes a performance assessment system for the development of school leaders. Philip Hallinger's "Problem-Based Learning: Resources for Urban School Leadership Training" provides a resource manual for the use of problem-based learning in leadership training. Arthur Danzig's "Leadership Stories: What Novices Learn by Crafting the Stories of Experienced Administrators" explores the value of practitioners' stories in learning to lead. (DFR)

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Preparing School Leaders

Larry Lashway

When paradigms shift, people ask, "Where will we find the leaders who can take us to the next level?" That question is currently under debate by those who prepare school administrators. Signs of an impending principal shortage, combined with a relentless reform movement that undercuts comfortable old assumptions about school leadership, have challenged the thinking behind traditional programs. How do we prepare leaders for a future we can barely visualize—and do it in a way that attracts enough of the right kind of people?

With the millennium (and those much-discussed 21st century schools) less than a year away, the answers are still far from clear. But leadership programs are starting to move in some promising new directions, including performance assessment, cohort programs, and higher standards.

While most of the current experimentation is taking place in university preparation program, K-12 practitioners should not consider themselves above the fray. Leadership development is no longer just a "front-end," one-time experience, but a lifelong process. Many of the lessons learned in university programs can be applied to local and regional professional development programs and leadership academies.

The publications cited here provide a sampling of current perspectives on the preparation of school leaders.

Joseph Murphy traces the history of leadership preparation programs in the United States.

David L. Clark outlines the current shortcomings of preparation programs and sketches some recommendations for reform.

Willis and Carol Furtwengler describe a performance assessment system for the development of school leaders.

Philip Hallinger provides a resource manual for the use of problem-based learning in leadership training.

Arthur Danzig explores the value of practitioners' stories in learning to lead.

Larry Lashway is a research analyst and writer for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management at the University of Oregon.

Murphy, Joseph. **"Preparation for the School Principalship: The United States' Story."** *School Leadership & Management* 18:3 (August 1998): 359-372. *Available from:* Carfax Publishing Company, 875-81 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139.

A training program for school leaders is more than a pathway to certification; it is also a snapshot of a theory of education, a concrete indicator of what its designers believe about educational leadership. Viewed historically, preparation programs provide insights into evolving beliefs about school leadership.

In this article, Joseph Murphy traces the development of principal training in the United States from the 19th century to the present, identifying several distinctive periods. Each of these was a period of relative stability followed by an "era of ferment" in which old ideas were challenged and gradually replaced by new perspectives.

In the earliest period (1820-1899), educational administration was not recognized as a distinct profession. In this "ideological era," school leaders were simply learned authorities whose insights into the truth provided guidance to teachers, students, and the public. Little training was required.

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The second period (1900-1946) saw the establishment of formal leadership programs, most of which emphasized technical skills, with a strong flavoring of business efficiency. In this "prescriptive era," professors (most of whom came from the superintendency) attempted to prepare candidates for the principalship as it existed, not as it might be.

The third period (1947-1985) was the "scientific era," in which theoretical ideas from the social sciences began to take precedence over seat-of-the-pants advice. Simultaneously, the makeup of faculty changed, with the old practice-oriented generalists being replaced by discipline-focused specialists with little practical experience and a strong bent toward rigorous theory and research. With enough objective data, they believed, school leadership could be reshaped in a rational way.

The current "dialectic period" (1986-present) has been characterized by highly critical evaluations of administrator preparation programs and persistent efforts to transform the profession. In particular, there has been better communication among the diverse groups interested in the preparation of school leaders, and a notable effort to define rigorous standards for the profession. The current period, of course, is difficult to see clearly, and we are far from certain what future historians will say about it. Most likely, we are about to enter another era of ferment, having decided that the existing paradigm is inadequate but not yet sure what should replace it. Because of this uncertainty, practitioners who choose to join the discussion may have an unusual opportunity to reshape the way their future colleagues will be prepared.

Clark, David L. **"Searching for Authentic Leadership in University Graduate Programs and with Public School Colleagues."** *Journal for a Just and Caring Education* 4:4 (October 1998): 365-73. *Available from:* Corwin Press, Inc., 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320. 805- 499-9734. $20.00 single issue. Web site: www.sagepub.com

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Among the many critics of leadership preparation programs are some who speak with the authority of insiders; those who run these programs are all too aware of the need for change. In this article (originally a paper presented to the American Educational Research Association), the late David L. Clark conceded that current preparation programs are "deservedly" held in low regard by other university faculty and graduates, and outlined some of the most urgent needs for reform.

First, admission standards are too often set to ensure quantity rather than quality. Administrator preparation programs should aim at admitting only those who can meet high academic standards as well as demonstrate a strong commitment to meeting the needs of young people.

Second, preparation should consist of cohesive and systematic programs that immerse students in leadership issues as members of a like-minded cohort. The traditional part-time study (an evening course or two each year) leads to a fragmented "catch-as-catch-can" approach to learning.

Third, university faculty pay too little attention to instruction. Instead, the existing reward structure lures them to spend much of their time in research (little of which makes a significant contribution to educational practice). Outstanding instruction and support for students should be hallmarks of any worthwhile program.

Fourth, administrator preparation programs are often isolated from other departments (including even those in the school of education), as well as from the larger academic community.

To make a meaningful impact, designers of preparation programs must overcome the widespread perception that the advice they offer is irrelevant, obscure, or simply obvious. Faculty must look for innovative but practical ideas that can be applied to school settings. In Clark's words, "We are teachers, scholars, colleagues, counselors, and support personnel to school leaders, or we are nothing at all!"

Furtwengler, Willis; and Furtwengler, Carol. **"Performance Assessment in the Preparation of Educational Administrators: A Journey."** *Journal of School Leadership* 8:1 (January 1998): 65-85. EJ 559 498. *Available from:* The UnCover Company, 3801 East Florida, Suite 200, Denver, CO 80210. 800-787-7979. $22.00. Web site: http://uncweb.carl.org

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One of the strongest trends in current educational thinking is performance assessment— the process by which students demonstrate practical skills rather than just recite knowledge. The authors of this article describe a performance assessment system they have used to capture the dynamic, complex world of school leadership.

Their model ascribes leadership expertise to five kinds of behavior: identifying and responding to variations in contextual settings; engaging in a reflective sense-making process; using a systems approach to solve problems; viewing others as capable and worthy of respect; and helping others to develop expertise.

The Furtwenglers' system is based on the development of performance assessment rubrics in several areas. *Inquiry* measures the degree to which prospective administrators are sensitive to variations in the environment, which range from novice ("notices variation") to expert ("helps others improve their knowledge and inquiry skills"). *Strategies* measures problem-solv-

ing behavior, ranging from simply describing the problem to being able to teach others how to solve it.

The third rubric reflects *belief in the worth of others*. At one end of the scale, students are self-oriented, making little effort to involve others in the decision-making process. At the "expert" end, students demonstrate a clear belief that others can contribute to the process. The final two rubrics measure the *complexity* of the problem and the *degree of independence* used by the student in solving the problem.

In addition to these rubrics, the authors developed ten job-related criteria with associated behavioral indicators. For example, behaviors such as "facilitates group process" and "deals tactfully with self and others in stressful situations" are indicators for the ability to use human relations concepts in interpersonal communication. These indicators allow evaluators not only to assess expertise, but to determine its strength in particular leadership roles.

The authors note that their system is in the early stages, and its validity and reliability are still being examined. However, they conclude that the use of the rubric has helped sharpen assessment of leadership performance.

Hallinger, Philip. **Problem-Based Learning: Resources for Urban School Leadership Training.** Oak Brook, Ill: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1997. 121 pages. ED 414 363. *Available from:* North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1900 Spring Road, Suite 300, Oak Brook, IL 60523-1480. 800-356-2735. $19.95 plus $3.95 shipping.
Web site: http://www.ncrel.org

Graduates of leadership preparation programs are often quick to criticize course work as being irrelevant, insignificant, and uninspiring. Abstract theory and tired anecdotes do not add up to a curriculum that prepares prospective leaders for the complex, fluid, and demanding challenges of today's schools.

In the past decade, however, a growing number of preparation programs have used a distinctly different approach: problem-based learning (PBL). This is built on the assumption that the only way to prepare school leaders for the dilemmas that will confront them in the school environment is to plunge them into lifelike scenarios that stretch their incipient leadership skills.

This volume from the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) presents a useful resource for those who wish to implement PBL in university programs or professional development activities. It includes an introduction to the PBL rationale, samples of materials, and guidelines for instructors and program designers.

The core principle of PBL is that the problem comes first. That is, rather than absorbing abstract knowledge and then applying it to a selected problem, students consider a realistic dilemma and identify the kind of knowledge required, making its relevance and significance clear. Typically, participants are formed into small teams that are responsible for producing some kind of plan that adequately addresses the problem. For example, they may be asked to develop a plan for integrating social services into the school environment, or to prepare a personal conference that will address teacher performance problems (and reach a decision afterwards).

While PBL seems to favor process skills over the acquisition of knowledge, its advocates argue that students learn at least 80 percent of the usual content, and do so in a way that is more meaningful and better retained. In addition, PBL also draws out the kind of human relations issues that underlie most leadership dilemmas.

The author emphasizes that setting up a PBL experience requires considerable planning. Problems must be selected for their relevance to actual work settings and geared to the knowledge and skills of participants. The problems also must be able to be addressed within an allotted time frame. Groups must be chosen carefully (NCREL considers groups of five to seven optimal). In addition, instructors must locate readings, supplementary materials, and human resources. (School practitioners or community members can be brought in to participate in role-play activities.)

Properly done, problem-based learning can help students acquire a deep understanding of critical knowledge, develop problem-solving and lifelong learning skills, and enhance their capacities for the job ahead.

Danzig, Arnold B. **"Leadership Stories: What Novices Learn by Crafting the Stories of Experienced Administrators."** *Journal of Educational Administration* 35:2 (1997): 122-137. EJ 544 310. *Available from:* The UnCover Company, 3801 East Florida, Suite 200, Denver, CO 80210. 800-787-7979. $22.25.
Web site: http://uncweb.carl.org

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Web site: http://eric.uoregon.edu

Graduates of school leadership preparation programs often complain that their courses consisted of little more than instructors recycling tired, old "war stories." While rambling, disjointed accounts of personal experiences usually have little value, Arthur Danzig provides evidence to show that story-telling instructors may at least be on the right track.

Danzig cites a growing body of research that indicates telling and listening to such stories is a significant means by which people make sense of their world. Stories "tell us about life as seen from the inside," illustrating the practical theories that guide actions. They provide rich descriptions of actual experience, helping the listener recognize the complexity of personal and practical knowledge.

While just hearing such stories can be helpful, Danzig found their benefits could be enhanced by having prospective leaders tell somebody else's story. He asked students in an administrator preparation program to interview experienced principals, eliciting biographical information and firsthand accounts of leadership problems they had encountered. Students then wrote up the results in narrative form, concluding the reports with their own comments and reflections.

Danzig found that having students write and analyze these stories allowed them to explore the ways veteran administrators solved problems, and to examine how their own novice thinking differed. The stories encouraged them to examine the informal and often elusive dimensions of school leadership, such as school culture, personal relationships, and values. In addition, the principals who were interviewed reported enjoying the experience, and many noted that the recounting process strengthened their relationship as mentors to the students.

While Danzig s study was conducted in the context of a formal preparation program, practitioners may be able to apply his insights in recruiting future administrators. Frequently, teachers with leadership potential view the principalship from a somewhat distant perspective, getting only glimpses of principals in action and gaining few insights into what and why they do what they do. Firsthand stories may capture their attention and engage their interest in the challenges of leadership. □

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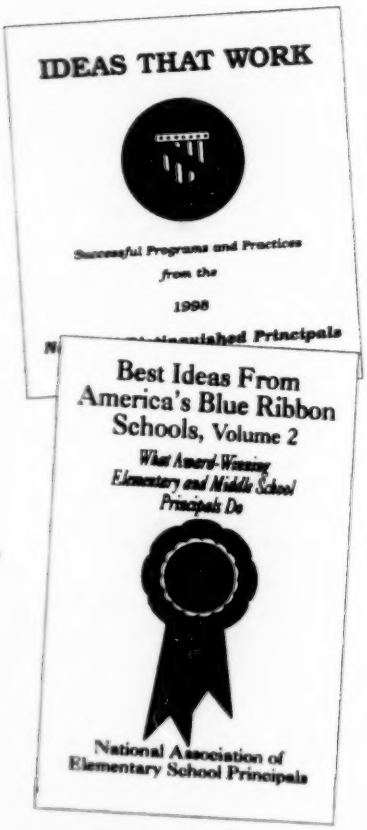

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